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ABSTRACT

Using the University of West Florida as a case study, six major dilemmas facing institutions as they attempt to implement reforms caused by recent changes in state-level teacher education policies are identified: (1) keeping abreast of events including reform proposals; (2) providing input to reform panels; (3) dealing with public relations; (4) coping with reform when resources are not increased; (5) providing time to validate changes; and (6) reconciling institutional philosophies and legislative mandates. The problems and challenges presented by each of these dilemmas are discussed within the framework of how they have been met at the University, and how they have affected policy making decisions within the college of education. Reactions of administration and faculty to legislative recommendations for changes are discussed. It is noted that the greatest challenges appear to be finding ways to use the visibility afforded teacher education as leverage to secure resources needed to implement desired changes, and maintaining the legitimacy of colleges of education as the principal component of the institutions responsible for teacher education. (Author/JD)

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Symposium

The Challenge of Reform: Preservice Teacher Education Policy in Florida

The View at the Institution

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ABSTRACT

Identification of six major dilemmas facing institutions as they attempt to implement reforms caused by recent changes in state level teacher education policies:

1. keeping abreast of events including reform proposals
2. providing input to reform panels
3. dealing with public relations
4. coping with reform when resources are not increased
5. providing time to validate changes
6. reconciling institutional philosophies and legislative mandates

The Challenge of Reform: Preservice Teacher Education Policy in Florida

The View at the Institution

In the midst of the current criticism of teacher education and the clamor for change in teacher preparation programs, there is at least one group of professionals who try to continue the day-to-day business of preparing teachers for schools in our state and nation. During this period of intense criticism, demands for instant data and rapid, forced change, teacher education institutions and their faculties find themselves confronted with a series of dilemmas and opportunities. In this portion of our symposium I shall attempt to identify the most important and most urgent of these dilemmas and opportunities and the manner in which some of our institutions are dealing with these challenges.

Background

Since we are using The University of West Florida as a case study, the following information may be of interest:

Overall enrollment:	6000 (approximate)
Teacher education enrollment	
Undergraduate:	500 (approximate)
Graduate:	450 (approximate)
College of Education faculty:	41
Arts and Sciences teacher education faculty:	20 (approximate)
Highest degree offered:	Master's; cooperative doctorate in education with Florida State University

The University first opened its doors to students in 1967 being organized at that time in three cross-disciplinary cluster colleges. About five years

ago we changed our structure to conform to a more traditional organization: College of Arts & Sciences, College of Business, and a College of Education. Owing to the original cluster college system, we maintain a strong cross-college governance system. Our major policy-making body for teacher education is a university-wide committee composed of representatives from the teacher education faculties in Education and Arts and Sciences, students, public school personnel, and the local junior college College of Education dean. This is the first year that the University has admitted freshmen; heretofore we had been an upper-level institution.

You should also know that in 1983 we completed our cyclical five-year State Department of Education program approval process; during 1984 we are in the process of preparing the self-study for our regional accreditation visit in 1985; in 1985 we will be preparing for the system-wide review of teacher education being conducted by our Board of Regents; and 1988 is our target date for our first NCATE accreditation visit. In addition to this activity, we have been asked to provide considerable amounts of data to the Joint Task Force in 1982-1983 and to this year's College of Education Study.

Dilemmas and Opportunities

Now, to turn our attention to the aforementioned dilemmas and opportunities I would like to focus on six problems that have confronted our institution as we have been involved with policy changes in teacher education.

1. Given the number of investigations being conducted at state and national levels, how does an institution keep abreast of events and get information to the appropriate individuals with the institution (e.g., president, vice-president, deans, faculty, staff, and students)?

To keep up with the reports the staff in my office does a careful reading of education journals, newspapers, newsletters, and publication announcements to identify those reports we feel we need to have in our office. The dean's office has served as a library and study area for many of these documents.

In addition to collecting information, we have used five major vehicles for disseminating the information and recommendations contained in the reports:

a. Presentations at general faculty meetings, including substantial discussion of the Joint Task Force recommendations at one of our faculty retreats.

b. Discussions at our College of Education Council and Teacher Education Committee; distribution of official meeting minutes.

c. Discussions at departmental meetings insofar as specific recommendations affect departmental policies and programs.

d. Panel discussions open to the University and local community.

e. Contacts with individuals in both written and oral modes.

A major task has been to find ways to condense much of the material so that faculty and students have sufficient information about the reports and recommendations to be able to interpret the recommendations and to be able to have enough time to read and digest all that is available. We feel indebted to those organizations and task forces that have provided executive summaries of their reports and to groups such as the Education Commission of the States and Education Week for their synopses of many of the reports.

2. In what ways can an institution provide input to the review/study panels, legislative committees, and education department personnel so that the members of the institution feel that they have had a suitable and significant opportunity to influence policy formation?

If trying to keep up with the reports has produced frustrations, then attempts to influence policy formation have often resulted in an emotion quite close to anger. There is an almost universal feeling that it is hardly worth the effort to influence the recommendations of study panels, legislative committees, and so on, because the panels seem to start with their answers and then construct their investigations and their discussions to arrive at these predetermined recommendations.

A second awareness that has developed is that there is a considerable difference between the type of logic that prevails among professionals and academics and that which typifies the political process. There is a strong feeling that almost all of the reports have political agendas rather than genuine concern for the improvement of education and teacher education. In the political arena "reasoning" is not necessarily the name of the game that is being played when discussing policy information.

Given these two perceptions, efforts to influence policy formation do exist and have been successful as we have seen in modifications of report recommendations and changes in proposed legislation. This influence is achieved mainly through:

a. Service on study panels and commissions by College of Education faculty and deans.

b. Formal presentations to commission hearings and legislative committees.

c. Informal oral and written reactions to commission members.

d. Recommendations for legislative action initiated by College of Education personnel.

e. Recommendations for rule changes and legislative action by formally constituted professional organizations such as the Florida Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, the Florida Association of Teacher Educators, and the state affiliates of the organized teaching profession.

The bottom line appears to be this: Let us give no group cause to infer College of Education support for any action or recommendation save that which it purposefully supports. The colleges must not shirk their responsibility to speak out on or supply information about issues in which they have a stake even if they feel that what they are saying is not being heard.

3. How does an institution deal with public relations within the local community and constituency given the state and national nature of the data being reported and recommendations being made?

Cultivation of relationships between the local media (newspapers, television, and radio) and Colleges of Education have never been more essential for maintaining the proper perspective of the local community for the local institution. A recent issue of AACTE's Briefs gives some excellent suggestions on how to deal with this question. In the main we have:

a. Tried to anticipate what is coming in the national press.

b. Made available appropriate local data to be published along with the national and state data as it is presented to the community.

c. Used public forums such as our local newspaper's "View from the Campus" and our local public television broadcast "Open Forum" to clarify issues before the public.

4. In the absence of additional resources, how does an institution manage to maintain its current operation and provide

a. the extensive data and other information about students; alumni, and programs being requested by the study commissions;

b. opportunities for experimentation and redevelopment of programs and/or program components; and

c. inservice opportunities for current faculty to update and upgrade information and skills related to new developments in teacher education?

Surprisingly enough, with the exception of the tremendous time pressures and energy drains on our information offices in the College, this dilemma has created more opportunities than it has caused problems. This is not to say that resources are not needed; quite the contrary is true.

a. We have been forced into developing better systems for managing the data we already have on our programs and graduates and underlined the need for us to have documentation of program quality and effectiveness. We are firmly convinced that one reason we have been open targets for our critics is that we have not had the hard data to refute their claims about our programs. In many cases we have the data, but it is not readily accessible. Owing to AACTE's new requirements for data and the many requests we have received

from state agencies, we are now reexamining where and how we store and access this information.

b. Attention is now focused clearly on improvement - what should be changed, why should it be done, and how can we make it happen? More people are talking to each other about program improvement than every before and there is a general positive aura around campus that change is expected. The state and national debates have given us a leverage for action, although not necessarily the financial support, that has not been present at other times. When we do get financial support, such as in the case of the funds appropriated for improvements in the internship components of our teacher education programs, there is a willingness to participate in the change and to take the time to document results so that there will be no questions of the effectiveness of the component.

c. It is to our credit as a profession that faculty members have an insatiable desire to know what is going on and to critique, criticize, and alter what is being recommended. Although we have never found sufficient time to do all that we would like, it is of interest to note in the past two years alone, we have participated in more inservice activities for ourselves than we have ever done before. Our need to know about the growing influence of computers in education and our responsibility for keeping up to date on the growing research on teacher, school, and administrator effectiveness has caused us to plan college-wide seminars and workshops to cope with this new wealth of information.

5. Given the accelerated pace of the expected implementation of changes in programs, how does an institution provide time to validate the changes by verifying effectiveness and have a chance to consolidate one change before another change is superimposed on the first one?

   The answer to this one is a very simple: We don't! Time and again I hear the following: Try to get the legislature to put a moratorium on new legislation on teacher education until we see what the effects are of the current program changes. To the extent it can, an institution must select those of the changes it feels will have the most substantial impact on the quality of its programs and place its developmental and evaluation energy and resources into these components. Each institution cannot implement and evaluate carefully every recommended change. Perhaps this is an opportunity for consortia of institutions to examine various aspects of related changes to shorten the time for obtaining field test data on the changes collectively.

6. When changes recommended by study commissions or imposed by legislative or executive mandate are at variance with institutional philosophy and policy, how does the institution attempt to resolve the inconsistencies?

   a. In the case of legislative mandates or State Board of Education rules there is no choice. The law or rule must be implemented until it is otherwise changed. Perhaps the best example of this is institutional consternation with Florida's "80% rule" affecting the approved program status of an institution's teacher education programs. In Florida at least 80% of a program's graduates must pass the Florida Teacher Certification Examination in order for that program to retain its program approval status. No provisions were made in the original legislation for programs graduating small numbers of students. As a result we find ourselves in situations in which programs having

three graduates, only two of whom pass the test, lose their approval status. This year there has been a bill filed to correct this difficulty.

b. In the case of recommendations, the effects of accepting or rejecting these recommendations are weighed in faculty and administrative councils. The criteria include both academic and political concerns. As a case in point, consider the Joint Task Force (p. 64) recommendation on teacher education program admissions. As an institution we have had our own basic skills requirements for graduation separate from the current mandated admissions tests (ACT, SAT). The Task Force recommendation to substitute the new state College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) for one or both of these is being carefully reviewed in our councils to be certain that the CLAST requirement will be at least as rigorous as our current standards.

A second example relates to the first recommendation of the College of Education Study of Florida's Post-secondary Education Commission (p. 39) on alternate routes to certification for secondary school teachers. Arts and Sciences and Education faculty on our campus have viewed this recommendation as counterproductive to all of the other gains and requests for improvement in teacher education over the past several years.

Unfortunately, external recommendations have served on some campuses, including ours, to reopen issues that have been resolved through previous compromise and policy formation. Having to revisit such concerns diverts attention and energy from other more productive activity related to the improvement of teacher education.

Institutional Postures

As an institution deals with these dilemmas and opportunities it can, actively or passively, react in one or more of the following ways:

1. The institution and its faculty can ignore what is happening.

   Several institutions and many faculty members have taken the posture that what is happening is but a temporary phenomenon. We have seen legislative changes done and undone; we have seen recommendations for change many times before. All this fuss will eventually subside, and the institution can go about business as usual.

2. The institution and its faculty can react through rebellion.

   The institution and its faculty have made a decision not to change what it is doing and makes a deliberate effort to counteract and to argue against the recommended changes.

3. The institution and its faculty can comply with the recommendations.

   The institution and its faculty have agreed to modify its policies and programs either because it agrees with the recommendations or it has acquiesced to the inevitability of the change.

4. The institution and its faculty lead what is happening.

   The institution and its faculty have opted to be at the frontier of change by serving as a resource of information for or as a model upon which recommendations will be formulated.

Although various aspects of all four response modes are present in each of the institutions in Florida, most of our institutions have seen the current reform movement as an opportunity to make long desired changes. The greatest challenges appear to be (a) finding ways to use the visibility afforded teacher education as leverage to secure the resources needed to

implement desired change, and (b) retaining the legitimacy of Colleges of Education as the principal component of the institution responsible for teacher education.

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